Martin Luther: Rebel in an Age of Upheaval, by Heinz Schilling, translated by Rona Johnston, New York, Oxford University Press, 2017, xviii + 612 pp. + 49 illustrations and 4 maps, £30 (hardback) ISBN: 978-0-19-872281-6

The calibre of this generously but discreetly illustrated study of Luther by a famous and influential historian of sixteenth-century Europe is very high. Better known as a 'structuralist' and as one of the inventors of the religio-political 'confessionalism' paradigm, Heinz Schilling admits here that employing biographical and theological genres are late developments for him. Although he might be vaguely characterized as 'culturally Protestant,' Schilling subscribes publicly to no religious persuasion and thus implicitly claims to be disinterested in dealing with the Luther-phenomenon. Targetting what he believes are open-minded modern people, his approach is paradoxical in tone. Hence, it both evaluates Luther's albeit disputed impact on the modern age and affirms that outside the devotional, or transcendental spiritual, sphere, Luther is 'different, not one of us … he is foreign to our age … a witness to a lost world.' (3). His regular tête-à-têtes and stormy disputes with God and the Devil as well as his inherited medieval prejudices testify to the latter. But I am sure that considering this book's sub-title: *Rebel in an Age of Upheaval*, Schilling would concur that irrespective of the Reformer's sometimes shabby medieval baggage and socio-politically conservative instincts, much of the genius of Luther was also foreign to his own age and subversive if it.

This important study first appeared in German in 2012, with revised editions later, that of 2013 being normative. Happily, its wider reception in the English-speaking world will be hastened by an overall convincingly idiomatic translation by Dr Rona Johnston of Yale – a monumental achievement. Anyone who has ever ventured into the field of translation can only corroborate that. This book adds to other recent and readable anniversary Luther-studies written in, or translated into, English by Scott Hendrix, Lyndal Roper, Richard Rex, Herman Selderhuis, Volker Leppin and Thomas Kaufmann, among others. Schilling, however, urges legitimately that it is high time to liberate Luther from the 'cult of remembrance.'

While the Wittemberg professor did not publicly disseminate his fundamentally ground-breaking religious and theological ideas until 1520, his half-rebellious 95 Theses in 1517 helped generate two conventional axioms in historiography and popular perception. First: the Reformation *began* in 1517. Second: the symbiosis between '1517' and 'Luther' is secure by both belt and braces. Consequently, while there have always been high-profile, centenaries of Luther's birth (1483) and death (1546), the 1517 anniversaries usually take

shape as another Luther memorial, rather than remembering the Reformation in general and as something more than a German event. This is understandable if not justifiable, and certainly 2017 was no exception. In literature, the various media and commemoration events, Luther's fame and celebrity status re-asserted itself in and around that year. In London, at the annual popular classical music *fest* (the 'Proms'), a day was devoted in 2017 to musically honouring the 500th anniversary of the 'Reformation' and Luther's 'seismic' text on indulgences in 1517.

Most Luther biographies dwell on Luther the religious revolutionary who took European Christianity by storm, resulting in what still is a divided Church. This was not Luther's objective; rather, it was an unintended consequence. As Schilling points out, Luther was not just a blast of oxygen for an ailing western Christianity; he was also a rebellious prophet driven by the captivity of his conscience to the infallible or pure *divine* Word in Scripture, rather than complying with what he saw as corruptible *human* teachings and traditions in the visible and fallible church. Individualism and subjectivism as paths to truth were alien to Luther, despite widespread fantasies to the contrary.

Schilling also reminds us that despite limited success, Luther and the Reformation failed overall; for the aim had been to have the whole Church and world subject itself to the will of God as articulated in the Bible. This would result from receiving God's promised free grace in good faith and awareness of sin, rather than offering God one's pretended virtue and list of good works – the basis of self-delusion which is toxic for the soul. This controversial insight is Luther's abiding contribution – a 'paradigm shift' (119) away from what he characterized as publicly egocentric and self-righteous religion.

However, that Schilling is not just yet other of Luther multiple biographers is evident from the book's fascinating Prologue and Epilogue. His stated approach is distinctive, since the focus is not primarily on Luther's religion, theology, and spirituality, although these are not at all side-lined. Instead, he illuminates more the *sitz im leben*, that is: the politics, sociology and culture of Luther and his environment, and thus the Reformer as he actually was, purportedly. Some of this is positive – Luther the theologian as a proud family man (something unheard of in earlier Christian tradition of holy men's or women's lives), his humour and conviviality, his contributions to church music, Bible translation, theology in language of the people, his astute political sense, his preaching that time is not endless – all are legacies of lasting value. Yet the dark side of the partially unreconstructed Luther unable to escape from the fetters of a pre-modern age is not airbrushed out. For example: his advocacy of repressive government violence by Christian rulers against civil disobedience or

rebellion, his intolerance of alternative theological viewpoints, his shameless use of the Bible to call for the persecution and riddance (but not, on paper, the killing) of Jews, Moslems, witches, prostitutes, and homosexuals – all seen as enemies of God beyond the reach of Christian love. Accordingly, Schilling's targetted Luthe , 'uncontaminated' with pietistic, nationalist, cultural or political distortions, immensely gifted but no saint, is with warts and all, corroborating Luther's self-image as a coarse, ill-tempered 'rough woodsman' (529), and so neither a Herculean saint nor seven-headed monster. History conquers hagiography, but this is not to denigrate the controversially prodigious Luther, rather to qualify him as a defective human being in a way he would admit to.

Ian Hazlett
University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK
Ian.Hazlett@glasgow.ac.uk